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### THE COUPLETS AND QUATRAINS IN THE TOWNELEY MYSTERY PLAYS.

It is customary to divide the plays composing the Towneley Mystery Cycle into three groups according to the order in which the various additions to the cycle are supposed to have been made. This division<sup>1</sup> is the one proposed by Mr. Pollard in his Introduction to the E.E.T.S. edition of the plays. There may be some question concerning the absolute bounds of each of these groups; but Mr. Pollard finds in the cycle certain well defined plays typical of each. His first, or earliest group consists of a number of plays of a simple religious tone and written in a simple meter, which from their form seem to be the most archaic portion of the cycle.<sup>2</sup> The second of Mr. Pollard's groups can conveniently be called the York group, because it has for its nucleus several plays and portions of plays borrowed directly from the York cycle.<sup>3</sup> It is supposed to have been the second group added to Towneley. The third,<sup>4</sup> or final,<sup>5</sup> group consists of a number of plays in a peculiar meter and of a markedly humorous cast and highly developed dramatic form, which register the high-water mark of dramatic talent within the mysteries. It is their exceptional qualities of style which have led scholars to give these plays the last place in the development of the cycle. Within these plays are found all the local references which have led to the connection of the cycle with Wakefield. For this reason the last group may well be called the Wakefield Group and their editor the Wakefield editor.

I have been thus explicit in defining these three groups, because I believe there are certain facts which will warrant us in reversing this order as far as the last two groups are concerned.

<sup>1</sup> *The Towneley Plays*, E. E. T. S. pp. xxvii ff.

<sup>2</sup> Such are plays 1, 5, 6, 7, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Hohlfeld, *Anglia*, vol. xi, 219 ff. *Die Altenglischen Kollektivmysterien*.

<sup>4</sup> *Towneley Plays*. pp. xx, xxii.

<sup>5</sup> *Anglia*, xi, 307 ff. etc.

I believe the York to be the final group. The reasons for this belief can be briefly tabulated.

But first attention must be called to another theory of the growth of Towneley. Prof. Charles Davidson<sup>6</sup> has noted the fact that certain couplets and quatrains in Towneley seem to be the work of an editor, and on the strength of this, without elaborating his proofs that these stanzas are editorial work, has suggested that the cycle is the compilation of an editor writing sometimes in couplets and sometimes in quatrains. He goes so far in proof of his theory as to offer instances of quatrains and couplets which he thinks are the work of this editor. Some of these will be noted later. This theory differs so completely from the usual three group one that it seemed worth investigating. Out of this investigation developed the following facts:—

1. That Professor Davidson was correct in calling these couplets and quatrains editorial.
2. That the couplets are used in editing every group except the plays borrowed directly from York.
3. That the quatrains alone are used in editing the plays borrowed directly from York.
4. That quatrains are also used with the other groups.

From these four facts two conclusions are obvious:—

1. That at least two editors have been at work upon the cycle.
2. That the York group of direct borrowings must have been the latest addition to the cycle, for that group alone contains no couplets.

This conclusion is so different from that usually accepted that the steps leading to it must be further explained. For convenience the couplets and quatrains will be considered separately. In order to show how they are the work of an editor, examples will be taken from each group in which they occur.

The most obvious example of the use of couplets in editing the plays, is found in play 2, a play generally assigned to the last or Wakefield group.<sup>7</sup> There is enough of the original stanza

<sup>6</sup> *Studies in the English Mystery Plays*, Charles Davidson (*Yale Thesis*, 1892), p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> E. E. T. S. edition of the plays, p. xxii.

left to illustrate the method of the editor. This original stanza ran *aaabcccbbdbd*. There are besides two stanzas at the end in the meter characteristic of the final group. Signs of editing commence with stanza 4. This and 5 and 6 were originally but two; the first ending with the second line of 5 and perfect except for a defective rhyme in line 44 (*boy*); the second ending with the close of 6. The second shows the development of couplets. The first *aaa* is normal, but *b* becomes confused with the following *c* rhymes; so that the next four lines rhyme *bbbb* and the regular cauda follows, *bdbd*. St. 7 is in the original meter. St. 8 is an enlargement of the usual pedes to five couplets. The usual cauda with one *b* rhyme from the pedes, *bbdbd*, follows in st. 9. Other instances of such a breaking up of the regular stanza occur in other plays. (Play 31, st. 3.) In st. 10 and 11 we have the reverse of this: 10, the pedes, remains, while 11, the cauda, is made into three couplets. St. 12 and 13 are in the original meter. The rhymes run, (12) *carpyng, lifyng, farthyng, hend, kend, hend, brend* (13), *hand, offryd, walkand, profyrd*. The *b* rhyme was originally in *-and*, which has been preserved in the cauda, but in the fourth line of the pedes has been attracted into *hend*, the *c* rhyme. Line 8 of the pedes seems to be omitted. St. 14 commences *aaa*, but then runs into couplets, which continue for 113 lines to the end of st. 15. St. 16 and 17, evidently originally formed one, of which 16, the pedes, is corrupt. Stanza 18 is 63 lines of couplets. In st. 19 we have another pedes, whose cauda is either omitted or incorporated into st. 20, twenty-four lines of couplets. St. 21 and 22 have the appearance of a normal stanza, from which rhymes *bccc* have been lost. St. 23 is forty-eight lines of couplets and twelve additional lines, which are a corruption of the normal stanza. These twelve lines begin with line 384. St. 24 and 25 are twelve lines in all. 24 begins in threes but the last four lines are *abaa*. 25 is the *bbdbd* portion of the original stanza. From st. 26 to 32, the stanzas are in couplets and threes and fours. These latter may, perhaps, be remnants of the original stanza. 33 runs *bbdbd*, the original cauda, with the last line of a pedes. 34 is *aabccb*, probably a normal pedes (for the number of *a* and *c* rhymes

varies even in the original stanzas which are still left), and not the usual *aabccb* stanza found in other plays of the cycle, of which it would be an isolated example in this play. St. 35 and 36 are in the peculiar meter characteristic of the final or Wakefield group. From this examination it is evident that the play has been worked over by an editor who wrote in couplets.

Play 1 is assigned by Pollard<sup>8</sup> to the earliest group. Here the work of editing with couplets is also obvious, though it cannot be traced in such detail as in play 2. There is evidence of editing at three points.

1. All the account of Lucifer seems to be an insertion. The usual position for the scene of Lucifer's Fall, the position it occupies in the other cycles, is before the account of the Creation and not, as here, in the midst of that account after the fifth day.<sup>9</sup>

2. There is a bad attempt at condensing in st. 16, line 131. Beginning with line 129, Lucifer says:

129. Now, thereof a leke what rekys vs?

130. Syn I my self am so bright

131. therefor will I take a flyght.

Lines 132-3 read:

*primus demon.* Alas, alas, and wele-wo!

lucifer, whi fell thou so?

A foot-note concerning this passage in the E.E.T.S. edition of the Towneley plays (p. 5), reads: "A scribe has mistaken Lucifer's boastful flight for his fall. One or more stanzas containing either a speech of Deus (cp. *Chester* and *Coventry Plays*), or the exclamations of the Devils as they fall (cp. *York*

<sup>8</sup>The Towneley Plays, Introduction, p. xxiii. Hereafter referred to as Intro.

<sup>9</sup>Besides, there are indications in other parts of the play that it originally contained no fall of Lucifer. Every cycle opens with the sentence, "Ego sum alpha et O," followed by a translation. or explanation in English. In the Towneley cycle this is prefixed directly to the Creation in such a way that no scene could ever have intervened between the two. Again st. 11, in couplets, seems to be a rough attempt by an editor to connect the fifth day of Creation and the Lucifer scene. Finally, at the very end of the play as it now stands, just before the break in the ms., Lucifer, in Hell, recounts briefly, as though it had not been given elsewhere, the event of the Fall. This may have been the only reference to the Fall in the original play.

*Plays*), must have been omitted." Granting the omission, can it not be taken as a deliberately attempted condensation by an editor, who is re-writing in the same manner as in pl. 2, rather than as the unintentional error of a scribe; especially when it occurs in the midst of a long series of couplets, and must have been a rather extensive omission?

3. The third point at which there is evidence of editing is in the probable insertion of three couplets at the beginning of st. 23. In st. 22 God bids an angel lead Adam and Eve into Paradise.

Ryse vp, myn angell cherubyn,  
Take and leyd theym both in,  
And leyf them there in peasse.

St. 23 follows,

Heris thou adam, and eue thi wife,  
I forbede you the tre of life,  
And I commaund, that it be gat,  
Take which ye will, bot negh not that.  
Adam, if thou breke my rede,  
thou shall dye a dulf full dede.

It is these three couplets which I believe to be an insertion. They are immediately followed by the cherub's reply to st. 22:

*Cherubyn.* Oure lord, oure god, thi will be done;  
I shall go with theym full sone, etc.

This, a few lines down, runs into a repetition of the command to Adam given at greater length. There is evidence in other places (Pl. 4, st. 7, etc.) that the couplet editor has tried his hand at enlargement. These three couplets, which are a break in the thought and are unnecessary, seem to form a similar attempt.

For these reasons; the fact that the Lucifer scene is out of place, the apparent omission at line 131 in the midst of couplets, and the apparent enlargement at line 197, it seems to be fairly well established that the long sections of couplets in play 1 are an editor's work.

I have said that there are no couplets in connection with the direct borrowings from York. An apparent exception to this

is found in stanza 49 of play 20. There is little doubt that this stanza is the work of an editor. Play 20 deals with the events in Christ's life just prior to and including his betrayal. St. 49 is in couplets and tells the story of the Last Supper. It follows the chronology of St. John's gospel, except that it places the washing of the disciples' feet last, where John gives it first. The story in St. John ends with the familiar sentence, "Arise, let us go hence" (John xiv, 31). There is some reason for thinking that the foot-washing scene originally occupied its correct chronological position in Towneley. After the table is laid John says:

346. Sir, youre mett is redy bowne,  
347. will ye wesh and syt downe?

To this Jesus replies:

348. yei, gyf vs water tyll oure hande,  
349. take we the grace that god has send;  
350. Commys furth, both oone and othere;  
351. If I be master I will be brothere.

Then follows, immediately, the scene with Judas and the Sop, the prophecy of Peter's denial, and a paraphrase of John xiv, 31.

382. *Ihesus*. Take vp this clothe and let vs go,  
383. ffor we haue othere thyngys at do.

This would naturally be the close of the scene and the action would be transferred to the Garden of Gethsemane; but line 384 reads,

384. Sitt all downe, and here and sees,  
385. ffor I shall wesh youre feet on knees,

and the foot-washing scene follows.

That this is an editorial distortion of the story seems probable for line 384 ought to follow 351. In this connection the corresponding scene from York is of interest. It occurs in play 27. Christ, in the upper room, has been talking to his disciples and, turning to one, asks water. The disciple replies:

Y Pl. 27, line 41. *Marc*. Maistir, it is all redy here,

42. And here a towell clene to taste.  
43. *Jesus*. Commes forthe with me, all in feere,

44. My wordis schall noght be wroght in waste.  
 45. Settis youre feete fourth, late see,  
 46. They schall be wasschen sone.

The relation between lines 350 and 384 in Towneley is as close as that between 43 and 45 in York. We can safely conclude that an editor has been at work.

Now, this couplet section is directly preceded by a number of stanzas which are admitted to have been borrowed directly from a version of York not now extant.<sup>10</sup> But there is no sign that these borrowed stanzas have been edited at all; they are apparently lifted without change from York. And there is no indication that the couplets are a re-writing of that borrowing. Indeed, the first few lines of couplets, which tell of the preparations for the passover, have nothing at all to correspond with them in the extant York cycle where play 26 stops with the scene of the conspiracy between the Jews and Judas, and play 27 opens abruptly with the scene of the Last Supper. The preparations for the Supper are not related. When we remember that nowhere else are editorial couplets found in connection with York borrowings, we are further strengthened in our opinion that these couplets have no connection with York.

Other long sections of couplets found in the plays are plays 5 and 6; play 10, st. 1; play 31, st. 1. But a study of these will only emphasize our contention, for plays 5, 6, and 10 belong to the first group<sup>11</sup> and of 31 Pollard says (Intro., p. xxvii, mentioning the play by its name Lazarus; in connection with two others): "There has been so much editing and interpolating, and the consequent mixture of metres is so great, that it is difficult to arrive at any clear conclusion about them."

Besides these long sections there are occasional short stanzas. These are found in play 1, st. 11; play 4, st. 7; pl. 23, st. 46 and 94; pl. 31, st. 3. Concerning the first two a few sentences from Davidson are sufficient. He says on page 129 of his thesis:—"The Woodkirk (Towneley), cycle is a collection of plays drawn from various sources. The compiler was a man of small

<sup>10</sup> Davidson, pp. 137-157.

<sup>11</sup> Intro. pp. xxiii.



poetical ability. His original verse was confined to couplets with an occasional attempt at quatrains. He did not hesitate to appropriate good work wherever he found it, or to do violence to rime or measure, if he considered the thought unclear or contrary to accepted traditions. As illustrations of his method we cite:—

1. For transition between selected parts of plays, the sixteen verses by cherubim between the first speech of Deus and that of Lucifer in Creation (pl. 1). These couplets seem to be a condensation of some unknown play.<sup>12</sup>

2. For Introduction, the four couplets introducing the call of Deus, 'Abraham, Abraham,' in the play of Abraham, (pl. 4)."

It might be thought confusing that play 4, written in quatrains, should be edited in couplets, but play 4 is part of the earliest group<sup>13</sup> as usually considered and, furthermore, a careful distinction must be made between those quatrains, which can be proved to be the work of an editor and others, such as those in this play, for which there is no proof that they are an editor's work.

It is not possible to state the exact nature of st. 46, pl. 23, though it appears to be an insertion; but st. 94 is evidently an enlargement of the usual *aabccb* stanza by the use of couplets.

Pl. 31, st. 3 has already been referred to in connection with st. 8 and st. 11 in pl. 2.<sup>14</sup> It is evidently a re-writing in couplets of the cauda of the normal stanza of the play. This stanza rhymes *ababababcccdcd*. It is sometimes written with internal *a* rhyme as in st. 7; sometimes with *a* as well as *b* as an end rhyme. In that case the cauda is printed as a separate stanza. Such are st. 5 and 6. It is evident that st. 2 corresponds metrically to stanza 5, as does st. 4. But st. 3, between them, is in couplets. It should correspond metrically to st. 6, the cauda.

<sup>12</sup> In this connection, it may be noted that these verses bear a certain resemblance to stanzas 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, of York play. It is evident however that the editor is re-writing simply the thought of these stanzas, because he makes out of alternate speeches by Good and Evil Angels, a speech by one Cherub.

<sup>13</sup> Intro. p. xxv.

<sup>14</sup> See above, p. 574.

Therefore, I conclude that it is a re-written cauda, as was st. 11 in pl. 2.

The discussion so far has gone to prove that couplets which are the work of an editor, are clearly found in connection with the first and the Wakefield groups, but not in connection with the York Group. With the quatrains, the situation is strikingly different.

The fact that many quatrains in the York borrowings are the work of an editor has been noted incidentally by Miss L. T. Smith in her edition of the York Plays; by Pollard; by Hohlfeld and others. Miss Smith prints, as foot-notes to her edition of the York Plays, those plays of Towneley, which she noted as borrowed from York. She failed to note T pl. 22, borrowed from Y pl. 34, though it has been referred to by Davidson and Hohlfeld.<sup>15</sup> As there has been no detailed comparison made elsewhere, this play will be taken as an example of the work of the quatrain editor.

T commences to borrow at Y st. 10, T st. 28, and continues the quotation through T 48, Y 29. Of these, stanzas 35-43 are a revision by the Towneley editor. St. 28 is Y st. 10: Y 11 is not in T: st. 29 is Y 12: Y 13 is not in T. Unluckily after 13 a leaf is lost in Y, so that the comparison breaks off. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that st. 30-34 in T are a quotation from the part of Y which is missing.

St. 35 is the first in quatrains. It is missing in Y, but the T stanzas seems to be an enlargement of a Y original, since the first quatrain is metrically like the Y cauda and forms an extra four lines on an eight line stanza. The Y stanza in this play rhymes *aabaabcbcb*. This stanza in T is *ababababcdcd*. So *cdcd* and *cbcb* correspond metrically. St. 36 and 37 are double quatrains, the York equivalent of which is lacking. St. 38 and 39 may be a faint echo of Y 14 or 15, but if so they are much revised. St. 40 commences again to correspond with extant Y 16. The editing of T from Y is obvious. In the text T is written as four lines with internal rhyme.

<sup>15</sup> Anglia, xi, p. 298.

- T 40. *Ihesus*. ye doghters of Jerusalem  
 I byd you wepe nothyng for me,  
 Bot for youre self and youre barn-teme  
 behald I tell you securle,  
 Sore paynes ar ordand for this reme  
 in dayes hereafter for to be;  
 youre myrth to bayll it shall downe streme  
 in euery place of this cyte.
- T 41. Childer, certys, thay shall blys  
 women baren that neuer child bare,  
 And pappes that neuer gaf sowke, I wys  
 thus shall thare hartys for sorow be sare;  
 The montayns hy and thise greatt hyllys  
 thay shall byd fall apou them thare,
- Y 16. *Jesus*. Doughteres of Jerusalem cytte,  
 Sees, and mournes no more for me,  
 But thynkes vppon this thyng;  
 For youre selfe mourne schall  
 3ee  
 And for þe sonnes þat borne schal be  
 Of yowe, bothe olde and yonge;  
 For such fare schall be-falle,  
 That 3e schall giffe blissyng  
 To barayne bodies all  
 That nc barnes forthe may brynge.
- Y 17. For certis 3e schall see  
 suche a day;  
 That with sore sighyng schall 3e saye  
 Vnto þe hillis on highte,  
 ffor my bloode that sakles is to shede and spyll thay will not spare.  
 'Falle on vs, mountaynes, and 3e may,  
 And couere vs fro þat felle affraye,  
 That on vs sone schall light.'
- Y 18. *iii Maria*.  
 Allas! þis is a cursed cas,  
 He þat alle hele in his hande has  
 Shall here be sakles slayne;

St. 42 is Y 19. To it are attached the caudas of Y 21 and 22. St. 43-48 are a direct quotation of Y 23-24, 26-29. St. 49 is in the meter of the Wakefield group. This comparison furnishes a clear illustration of the way in which the quatrain editor worked, when re-writing portions of the Y plays which he borrowed.

There are also a few examples of his work in plays not directly borrowed from Y, which he has revised in places. Such

are plays 23 and 28, assigned by Mr. Pollard to the first group.<sup>16</sup> Play 23 contains four such stanzas; st. 1, 49, 55, 86. Of st. 1, as well as st. 2 and 3, Hohlfeld<sup>17</sup> says, that he thinks they are a scribal error or a wholly unfounded later addition and that the play really began with st. 4. The play is upon the Crucifixion. These three stanzas are an introduction by Pilate and are certainly superfluous, for he takes no part in the first scene. In both T and Y that is an account of the nailing of Christ to the Cross, in which the dialogue is between the soldiers, or, as T has it, the torturers, who do the deed. This conversation begins Y and opens at the fourth stanza in T. For these reasons I am inclined to think the speech of Pilate an editorial addition. The other three quatrains also have the appearance of being revisions or insertions; though it is difficult to be certain about them, especially the first two. Both st. 49 and 55 occur in the midst of an elaborate dialogue between Mary, John, and Christ, in which there is considerable variety of meter. The whole forms a lament of Mary over Christ on the Cross. These laments were very common and often very elaborate, so that it is difficult to say whether these quatrains are part of the original, or an attempt to condense or enlarge by later authors. That the dialogue was thus enlarged is indicated by stanza 57, which is in the characteristic meter of the Wakefield group and was, therefore, probably added by its author. St. 86 may be a similar revision or insertion though there is nothing to indicate this except the fact that such is the nature of other quatrains in the plays.

Play 28, Doubting Thomas, assigned to the first group,<sup>18</sup> is largely in double quatrains. One stanza, 5, is doubtless an insertion by the quatrain editor, as there is strong reason for believing that all the stanzas from 11 to the end are his work.

Play 24, assigned to the Wakefield Group<sup>19</sup> is another illustration of the tendency of the editor to write in quatrains. The normal stanza of this play is *ababcb*; but st. 38, for in-

<sup>16</sup> Intro. p. xxiv.

<sup>17</sup> Anglia xi, p. 298.

<sup>18</sup> Intro. pp. xxiv, xxv.

<sup>19</sup> Intro. p. xxii. Anglia. xi, p. 309.

stance, has become so corrupt that only verses 1 and 4 rhyme. It is followed by a quatrain in 39 and then 40 is in the usual stanza. St. 21-25 are all quatrains. 26 rhymes *abba*. Other stanzas, as 39, 47, 54 show considerable corruption of the stanzaic structure.

But a still better illustration of the editorial revision of stanzas of the Wakefield group by the quatrain editor is found in play 20, where in the midst of a series of quatrains there occur two typical Wakefield stanzas, 97 and 100, alternating with two (98, 99) and (101, 102), already commencing to break up into quatrains, and preceded and followed by other quatrains seemingly derived from a Wakefield original.

There are other quatrain stanzas in the plays, but enough have been discussed to make plain the present contention. It is evident from this analysis, that the quatrains are a distinct characteristic of the direct borrowings from York, but are also found in connection with the other two groups. When we connect with that the facts, that, with one exception, the plays which contain York borrowings, contain no couplets; that, in the single case in which a play contains both York borrowings and couplets, the couplets are not an integral part of the borrowing; and that the other two groups have couplets in connection with them; we are led to conclude that two editors have been at work, that the plays from York were added to the cycle after the couplet editor had completed his work, and further, that the York borrowings must have been the last addition to the cycle, since all the other groups, even the Wakefield, contain couplets.

Yet to thus shift the position of the York and Wakefield groups does not invalidate the evidence of style and meter, which led to the grouping explained in the beginning of this article. The fact that the York group must have been added to the Towneley cycle after the Wakefield group was written, does not hinder York from having been written as a part of the York cycle, before Wakefield was written as a part of the Towneley cycle. The question upon which style and meter can be taken as evidence is the question of the time of writing. The question of which this article is a discussion is not the question of the time

of writing, but the question of the order of insertion in the Towneley cycle.

The presence in Towneley of two such remarkable groups as the direct borrowings from York and the humorous and dramatic plays by the Wakefield author has inevitably led to considerable discussion of the relations between the two cycles. With the general statement that there must have been close connection between Wakefield and York, between the editors of the Towneley cycle and the editors of the York cycle, one cannot disagree, especially when it is so aptly and succinctly put as lately by Prof. Gayley.<sup>20</sup> But it is obvious that, if the present conclusions are correct, the details of such a statement must undergo considerable modification. This is especially true in a discussion of the parts played by the York and Wakefield groups in building up such a play as play 20 in Towneley, where Wakefield stanzas are found worked over by the quatrain editor, and at the same time prefixed to a long borrowing from York; in one case apparently in the play before York was added; in the other apparently prefixed after the York addition was made. But any such study would lead us far away from the scope of the present article to discussions, on the one hand, of the nature and extent of the work of the author of the Wakefield group, and on the other, of the relation of the whole Towneley cycle to the whole York cycle; the extent of the connection in time, and its varying nature from the beginning to the end of the period of connection between the two.

The liturgical connection between York and Towneley I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> The nature and extent of the Wakefield group will be the subject of a subsequent article. For the present I have only desired to raise the question of the order of Pollard's three groups and to present my reasons for placing the York group last.

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<sup>20</sup> Gayley. *Representative English Comedies*, Introduction, pp. xxv-xxix.

<sup>21</sup> *The Liturgical Basis of the Towneley Mysteries*, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America xxiv 3, pp. 419-469.